

## **HURRICANE KATRINA: GUNTER LIBRARY'S EXPERIENCE**

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Established on August 30, 1955, the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory's research library was named in honor of Gordon Gunter by the Board of Trustees of the Institutes of Higher Learning on December 21, 1972. Located on the first floor of the Caylor Building on the north side of the campus, the Gunter Library overlooks Halstead Bayou and its adjacent marshland. About 30 inches of water originating from the bayou entered the Caylor Building as Hurricane Katrina's storm surge pushed onto the coast during the mid morning hours of August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (one day short of the library's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary). Water entered the library through four door vents and under the doors. Upon inspection by Joyce Shaw, head librarian, the morning of August 30<sup>th</sup>, debris line evidence revealed that 13 to 15 inches of water had flowed into all library rooms and offices. Damage included the loss of all library furnishings, a photocopy machine, computers, fourteen filing cabinets, and all library materials on bottom shelves or stored lower than 13 inches from the floor. Collection losses in the library included all or parts of 137 journal titles, 1,188 books, and 2,964 reprints. All library materials held at the J. L. Scott Marine Education Center in Biloxi were lost. A considerable amount of materials on loan to faculty, staff, and students and housed in several campus buildings was lost.

Significant recovery efforts began on September 8<sup>th</sup> when laboratory employees were called back to work. Library staff with the help of three graduate student volunteers and two technicians began mucking out the library, inventorying losses, and removing materials from the three offices. Having arrived at 6:30 pm Saturday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, technicians from Blackmon Mooring Steamatic (BMS), began surveying the damage and planning the cleanup the following morning. After their departure on September 14<sup>th</sup>, three dehumidifiers from the main campus library and one dehumidifier from Mote Marine Laboratory were set into continuous operation. Between the removal of mold contaminated materials, the dehumidifiers, and library staff and volunteers cleaning books and bound journals by hand, the remainder of the scientific collections was 100 percent recovered from the destructive aftermath of the storm.

Classes began on campus on September 19<sup>th</sup>, requiring the library to re-establish a baseline of operations for students. A temporary reference desk was set up in the portico of the building with library staff retrieving books and journals for students. Reference and research services were maintained by using laptop computers and other campus computers with internet access.

In May 2006 about 8 months after Hurricane Katrina, Gunter Library hosted the annual SAIL meeting. For two and a half days, SAIL members experienced the every day life of Katrina disaster area detours, destruction, and debris while attending seminars and meetings.

In late February 2007, the Emergency Preparedness task force established by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Southeastern Atlantic Region held two days of meetings at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory hosted by Gunter Library. This group toured the Mississippi Gulf Coast from Ocean Springs to Pass Christian, a distance along 50 miles of coastline. Stops included William Carey University Library and Harrison County Regional Library in Gulfport and University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Library in Long Beach. These libraries were severely damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Generous donors have assisted library recovery. Rotary Zones 29 and 30 provided funds for purchasing furniture, equipment, and supplies. Funds for books purchases came from a SOLINET/Mellon grant. Other donors included the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Southeastern Region, who purchased two desktop computers, a scanner, and five reference books for the library, and many individuals who sent books and journals. Additional assistance was received by the placement of a Katrina Relief worker for a year by the South Mississippi Regional Planning District.



Water and mold damage to library books from Hurricane Katrina (photo by A. Russell)



Books were thrown off the shelves into marsh muck by the flood waters  
(photo by A. Russell)



Library materials joined damaged computers and furniture in debris piles  
outside the Caylor Building



Library staff met to discuss damage and recovery efforts  
(photo by A. Russell)